



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



EASTER BUNNY SHARES MESSAGE TO PURPLE UP!



Jessica Davidson, Davison County Veterans Service Officer in Mitchell, conveyed her support of the military children to the top-most by donning an Easter Bunny costume and visiting military children in her community.

Davidson said this gave her an opportunity to wish them a Happy Easter and thank them for the sacrifices they have made.

PURPLE UP!

Inside this issue:

Coffee with Fred	2
Choice Program	2
Zimmerman Named to BHAHH Board	3
Training Exercise for 881st Units	4
Mobile Vet Center to Visit Turner County	5
Life Insurance for Navy Members	5
Upcoming Events	6



IT'S COFFEE TIME WITH FRED

Fred Kuil, Douglas County Veterans Service Officer, has started a new program—"Coffee Time with Fred."

Fred will host "Coffee Time" quarterly at the Douglas County Court House in Armour. He serves up coffee, cookies, hospitality, and information on benefits and services. This month, Fred had 36 veterans join him for coffee. SDDVA Field Officer Kevin Bowen and Desiree Boyer from the VA were on hand to visit with veterans as well.



VA SECRETARY PRAISES CONGRESS FOR EXTENDING CHOICE PROGRAM

Following the U.S. Senate's passage by unanimous consent, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that extends the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) until the funding dedicated to the program is exhausted. The VCP is a critical program that increases access to care for millions of veterans. Without this legislation, the ability to use VCP funding would have ended abruptly on Aug. 7 of this year.

U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin released the following statement of support: "Congress has once again demonstrated that the country stands firmly united when it comes to supporting our nation's veterans," Secretary Shulkin said. "The United States Department of Veterans Affairs truly appreciates the quick bipartisan resolution Congress provided with the extension of the Veterans Choice Program." "I want to thank Chairman Johnny Isakson, Ranking Member Jon Tester, Chairman Phil Roe, Ranking Member Tim Walz and all the members of our committees for their leadership as we continue to make improvements to increase veterans' access to care," Secretary Shulkin continued. "I also want to thank Senator John McCain, who has championed choice for veterans and whose work on this issue allowed for swift and successful resolution."

"The VA looks forward to continued bipartisan support as we partner with Congress to not only develop a long-term solution for community care, but also work toward other critical legislation, such as accountability and appeals modernization to ensure veterans receive the highest quality of care, benefits and support they have earned."

ZIMMERMAN APPOINTED TO BLACK HILLS HABITAT FOR HUMANITY BOARD

An unprecedented number of warriors are coming home to reintegrate to civilian life, and a plethora of needs face veterans with disabilities. Although healthcare & education are readily available, paramount are PTSD and general reintegration, particularly when affordable, accessible housing is very limited.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, believes the method of Black Hills Area Habitat for Humanity uniquely serves veterans in need of housing, "Habitat gives the returning veteran an opportunity for housing that is unique. With very high costs of homes, down payments, and just time to reintegrate and care for self and family, pressures usually give way to giving up. Habitat off-sets so many of these issues to gaining a foothold in that first HOME".

When we think about supporting our 272,000 South Dakota veterans, military personnel, and family members, we believe support of veteran *families* is also very important. According to Secretary Zimmerman, "Thanking veterans and military personnel for their service, and asking families if there is anything that can be done to help seems cliché, but reality is many do not step out and do either of these". Black Hills Area Habitat for Humanity and its army of volunteers is in a wonderful position to put our arms around these men and women and offer our gratitude and grace, while rolling up our sleeves to build new and improve current aging housing through our Home Repair program with any needed home modifications.

As a new incoming board member of Black Hills Area Habitat for Humanity, Secretary Zimmerman is looking for groups and individuals that can help serve and raise critical resources to support veterans. Small amounts of support pulled together to obtain materials for veterans to help create their needed housing solution is very doable according to Mr. Zimmerman and is in line with Habitat's approach with churches and businesses. Perhaps you are part of an outdoor group, hunting club or team of some kind...how can you mobilize to honor our veterans? Contact scott@blackhillshabitat.org for more information.

Zimmerman will join the BHAHH Board of Directors effective July of 2017!



COLLECTIVE TRAINING EXERCISE INCREASES READINESS FOR 881ST UNITS

South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers with the 881st Troop Command and Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment participated in a collective training exercise throughout the Black Hills, April 5-6, to increase their combat readiness. Also known as Operation Thunder, the training event allowed the units to work together to practice medical evacuation procedures and response times involving realistic combat scenarios.

The Rapid City-based 1-189th Soldiers, an aerial medevac unit which operates HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, were prepped and prepared to execute missions non-stop for 36-hours, operating out of two forward operating bases at Fort Meade and Custer.

For the Sturgis-based 881st, the battalion headquarters for the 1-189th, the exercise was about finding ways to create and integrate all their soldiers into the training and stress them at every level throughout the units in realistic combat operations.

The unit responded to a variety of medevac requests throughout the Black Hills region and arrived upon scenes involving wounded soldiers from vehicle-borne explosive devices, wounded civilians or picking up high-value targets.

The range of missions or scenarios created by the 881st staff for the 1-189th Soldiers was a key objective for the exercise.

Some of the 881st Soldiers were once members of the 1-189th, which gives them the insight to create a realistic combat training.

This event is just the first phase for the battalion and its subordinate units, and it will continue to grow throughout the year and into the following year.

The training event may have come at a perfect time for the 1-189th, as the unit is preparing for a yearlong deployment to Kuwait this fall.



MOBILE VET CENTER TO HIT TURNER COUNTY

All Turner County veterans, as well as other area veterans, are invited to a Veterans Outreach event from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Turner County Courthouse in Parker on Thursday, May 11,

Doug McCuddin of Sioux Falls and Jeff Gorr out of Rapid City, Outreach Specialists with the Vet Centers, will be on hand to provide "Combat-Era" Veterans with information on Vet Center counseling services and referral materials to other VA and Community agencies. They will be bringing their 38' Mobile Vet Center to meet in a confidential/private environment.

The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems. Vet Centers are community based and part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The goal of the Vet Center program is to provide a broad range of individual and group counseling, marriage and family counseling, outreach, and referral services to eligible veterans in order to help them make a satisfying post-war readjustment to civilian life. The family members of all combat veterans are eligible for Vet Center services as well.



NAVY MEMBERS CAN NOW MANAGE LIFE INSURANCE ON LINE

Navy members now have the opportunity to enroll or change their service members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) online. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began enrollment for Navy members in the SGLI Online Enrollment System (SOES) on April 5. SOES allows active-duty and eligible reserve and Guard members to manage their SGLI and Family SGLI coverage electronically at any time, from anywhere in the world.

"Now, the Navy, and soon all of our nation's service members, will be able to manage their coverage and beneficiaries online — just like their private-sector counterparts" said Thomas Murphy, acting under secretary for Benefits at VA. "Moving to an online, self-service system brings the SGLI program in line with current insurance industry best practices."

The VA is collaborating with the Department of Defense (DoD), Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and the Uniformed Services to develop this system. It will be available through DMDC's milConnect web application, which allows service members to review personal, health care and personnel information from one reliable source, the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

The SOES rollout to the remaining uniformed services will be completed in phases through the end of the year, ensuring a smooth transition for all service members. To ensure support for service members using the new system, the VA is working with DOD and the individual uniformed services to train key service personnel as SOES becomes available to each branch.

More information on SOES is available at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect>.

Upcoming Events

Apr 13—SFVAHCS Veterans Town Hall—Dakota Playhouse—DSU Campus—Madison—5:00 pm (CT) with Benefits Fair at 4:00 pm (CT)
Apr 13—Purple Up for Military Kids Day
Apr 14—All State Offices will be closed
Apr 19—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Apr 22—USD Student Veterans Club 5K Run—10:00 am (CT)
Apr 28-30—DAV Annual Convention—AmericInn—Fort Pierre
May 5-6 Veterans Day and Howard Wood Relays
May 6—Military Order of the Purple Heart Convention—Rapid City Howard Johnson—10:00 am (MT)
May 12—Improving Combat Veterans Care—Sioux Falls University Center
Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)
Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota
Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota
Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota



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